

PRESENT-DAY PROBLEMS CONCERNING THE USE OF THE YOUNG-EARTH,
"FLOOD GEOLOGY" VIEW OF CREATION

By D. Wonderly, Mar. 1996

Introduction

The teaching of biological evolution in our nation is the real reason for our being concerned about the age of the earth and universe. Christians very often have the idea that if we say the earth may be millions of years old, then that is a compromise with the teaching of evolution. But actually, evolution and age are two very different topics.

So, frequently Christian groups go to talk with school officials about the teaching of evolution in the public schools, but the Christian parents and church leaders start mixing the ideas of a very young earth and universe into the discussion--as though that were the issue. This nearly always brings disgrace on the Bible and Christianity, because most of the school officials know at least something about the apparent very old characteristics of the earth's crust.

The young-earth view of creation is now being taught dogmatically in many evangelical churches in the U. S. and Canada, with the result that many Christians think it should be used as a "test of faith." Thus numerous churches require belief in young-earth doctrine of their members. However, this is a relatively new development among conservative evangelicals. During the first half of this century, a high percentage of evangelical leaders (then usually called "fundamentalists") believed that we should accept the many evidences for great age which God has allowed to exist in the rock layers of the earth and on the ocean floor.

But in the 1950's a few fundamentalist Christians began to accept the young-earth, "Flood geology" view, due to the long-term promotional efforts of the Seventh-Day Adventists of the U. S. and Canada. The leaders of that denomination had held that view since the beginning of the century. Then, in the 1960's Henry M. Morris and John C. Whitcomb began to popularize this belief among fundamentalists and some other Christian groups.

Some principles which we need to consider in thinking about this view, which now is widely known as "creationism," or "scientific creationism" are:

1. We, as Bible-believing Christians, reject the major evolutionary theories which the world teaches, because they contradict the plain teaching of the first 3 chapters of Genesis, and of other parts of the Bible.
2. Contrary to popular belief, there are no really strong evidences that life on earth arose and developed to its present form by evolution. But there are many strong evidences in the rock strata of the earth, and on the ocean floor, that the earth is very old.
3. In combatting the doctrine of evolution, Christians have much excellent evidence to present. But we only weaken our influence against evolution when we bring in arguments for a young earth. (Arguments for a young earth are not verifiable in the same way that arguments against evolution are. ^{most of} The scientific arguments which we use against evolutionary theory can be verified by standard procedures of scientific research, but arguments for a young earth can not.)

4. The conservative evangelical leaders of the first half of this century were well aware of the fact that belief in an old earth is not a compromise with evolutionary theory. They accepted the first 3 chapters of Genesis as divinely inspired and literally true--just as we do. But they realized their responsibility to carefully consider the strong evidences for great age, and not to deny them--especially not deny them in the presence of unbelievers.
5. There are no definite teachings in the Bible which tell us how old the earth and universe are. This has been recognized by large numbers of conservative Bible scholars ever since long before Charles Darwin. Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," but it does not tell us when the beginning was. However, it does add, in verse 2, that the earth was "formless" (or "a waste"), and also empty and dark. This description has, for centuries, led many Bible scholars to understand that the earth had to be put through a long and elaborate process before it was ready to sustain plant and animal life.
6. It is necessary that we recognize that the rock strata of the earth have many characteristics which seem to be unmistakable evidences of great age. For example, many of the kinds of rock which are present in the strata beneath us, here in the eastern part of the U. S., are sedimentary types which are formed only at slow rates, under tranquil, marine conditions. (Sedimentary rocks are usually those types which are formed by particles settling out of water--though a few are deposited by wind.) Most kinds of limestone, and all types of shale, are formed by slow settling out of water, and then undergoing lithification by slow processes. There is no way that we can deny that there are immensely thick and broad deposits of these types of rock beneath us, since practically every oil well drilled has to pass through many hundreds of feet of such rock layers. A considerable number of young-earth creationists admit the presence of these, but insist that they have a right to disregard and ignore their characteristics, because the original young-earth leaders taught that the Bible definitely teaches that the earth is only a few thousand years old. (See Endnote # 1)

Now note the block of 5 items listed just to the right on this page. Those are other well-known evidences that the earth is very old. (Notice that all of the evidences listed are non-radiometric. We do not need or try to depend on radiometric dating to learn that the earth is very old.) Old-earth creationists believe that it is wrong to ignore or disregard the presence of these deposits and structures on the earth. However, believing the earth is old does not at all keep us from believing that God's creating of mankind (Adam & Eve in the Garden of Eden) was recent. Most theistic evolutionists believe that God created (or supervised the evolving of) mankind at least one million years ago. We reject that belief as unbiblical, and we also know that no reliable scientific evidence for that early an origin of mankind has been found.

A FEW EXAMPLES OF VERY OLD SEDIMENTARY DEPOSITS ON THE EARTH

1. The Bahama Banks, between Florida and Cuba, 14,000 feet thick--built up by the slow, natural growth of lime-secreting, marine organisms.
2. Thousand-foot thick deposits of marine fossils still in the orderly arrangement in which they grew.
3. A 4,600-foot thick coral reef which grew on top of an old, submerged volcanic cone.
4. Broad expanses of ocean floor covered with over 1,000 feet of undisturbed sediment--composed of practically pure microfossil shells, without land-derived debris.
5. Thick, marine chalk deposits built in many stages, with extensive growth and "cement work" of lime-secreting animals before the addition of the next layer.

D.W.

7. A high percentage of the evidence for great age of the earth's crust comes from the drilling explorations of petroleum geologists and from their careful studies of drilling cores which they remove from the wells as they drill through the many types of rock and fossil deposits. Since all of the studies made in petroleum exploration are specifically for the purpose of discovering more oil and gas deposits, the petroleum geologists do not think much about evolutionary theory. In fact, in the many hundreds of pages of petroleum geology research reports which I have studied, I have never found any mention of evolutionary theory or dogma.
8. What about evidences for a young earth? We often hear and read about characteristics of the earth and universe which young-earth creationists regard as being positive evidences for a young earth. But, in reality, none of them have been scientifically verified with any degree of certainty. (See Endnote # 2.) This may come as a surprise to some readers, but it really is true that these supposed evidences do not measure up to the long-established standards of consistent scientific research, when a real research project is done on them--either by creationists or evolutionists. (See Endnote # 2 for a few examples.)

In the absence of definitely verified evidences, the proponents of young-earth creationism simply fall back on their firm belief that the Bible tells us that the earth is very young. We do not condemn them for believing that; they have a right to such a belief. But large numbers of even the most conservative Bible-believing scholars say that they can not find such teaching in the Bible.

9. A very important principle for any study of origins or of the age of the earth is that we must not postulate or assume acts done by God which are not in agreement with his righteous, consistent, and truthful nature. When He established the natural laws by which the universe, earth, and life upon the earth would be governed and controlled, those natural laws (or "working principles" if you prefer), were good (cf. Gen. 1:18, 21, 25, and 31) and did not need adjusting or changing. A considerable number of young-earth creationists are reluctant to accept this principle, and so try to assert that the laws of diffusion, metabolic chemical reactions, etc., which control the growth rates of marine plants and animals were subject to extreme change, so as to allow marine life to reproduce and grow at 100 or more times their present, normal rate. This is the equivalent of accusing God of being erratic and inconsistent. The purpose in hypothesizing such radical changes in what we call "the balance of nature" is to attempt to have the coral reefs, chalk-producing organisms, and other organisms which build calcium carbonate geologic structures all producing these great deposits which we now observe, without having to do it by normal growth rates. This kind of hypothesizing also results in the assumption by some creationists that various inorganic deposits of evaporite minerals were produced by abnormal processes, controlled by temporary changes in the natural laws which God established for the universe.

At least a few young-earth creationists are similarly tempted to assume that God created the sedimentary strata of the earth--including ready-made, dead fossils, and the marks of erosion which we find on top of various buried formations of sedimentary rock--all ready-made. In the mythology of ancient Greece, their gods supposedly did things like that, but our God is consistent, truthful, and far above all such acts which would obviously make his natural revelation to be misunderstood.

10. In closing I wish to say that I have numerous Christian friends who are young-earth creationists, and I most certainly do not hesitate to consider them to be high-quality Christians and useful to the Kingdom of God. I am perfectly willing to worship with them, and live with them if the occasion should arise. And I would be particularly happy to join them in a prayer meeting to pray for people who are lost and on their way to a Christless eternity, and for all of the youth of our community and nation who are currently exposed to Godless teaching in the public schools and to the many Godless influences which our society tries to force upon them.

Furthermore, I have long maintained a practice of not inquiring into the beliefs of Christian friends, concerning the age of the universe or earth. However, if I do learn that they hold to a young-earth view, I feel obligated to gently caution them not to allow this belief to become a stumbling block to persons or groups who are familiar with the characteristics of the earth's crust.

ENDNOTES

1. The many efforts of persons who are untrained in sedimentary geology, to explain how the Flood could have formed most of the sedimentary strata of the earth, have turned out to be extremely misleading to many people. Books and lectures of this type are filled with descriptions which are not in agreement with the laws of nature by which such rock layers are formed. The descriptions visualized by the "Flood geologists" are not at all like the processes by which the various kinds of sedimentary rock layers have to be formed (and are still being formed at various locations on the earth). For example, the majority of sedimentary rock layers are composed of very fine particles which require considerable periods of time for settling out of the water, before the next layer is added. (And consider the fact that there are at least three miles thickness of those kinds of rock strata beneath Garrett County and the surrounding counties.) But the prevailing attitude of those creationists who teach a "Flood geology" is that they have no obligation to examine geologic data which apparently might indicate that the earth is old. So most of these creationists have no idea what or how many data do exist.
2. If conclusive verification of any evidences for a young earth had been achieved, there would have certainly been a prompt announcement of it in the most widely circulated young-earth creationism paper in the world, Acts and Facts. I have read that paper regularly almost since its beginning in the early 1970's, and am sure that no such announcement has been made.

It is true that a few premature announcements of what were thought to be solid evidences for a young earth which would stand up under careful scientific investigations have been made. But each of them has then failed to be verified. A few of these were:

- (1) The young-earth creationism assumption that the small amount of space dust found on the surface of the moon is proof that the moon is very young. (Later satellite tests showed that the amount of space dust out beyond the earth's atmosphere is very small.)

- (2) A supposed relatively rapid shrinking of the sun's diameter. (An excellent "case-study" article on this, entitled "The Legend of the Shrinking Sun," is found in the Journal of the Scientific Affiliation, v. 38, no. 3, 1986, p. 164-174. The article is by Howard Van Till, Professor of Physics and Astronomy in Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI.)
- (3) A supposed absence of unconformities and extensive erosion surfaces in the strata through which the Grand Canyon was cut.
- (4) The supposed rapid decay of the earth's magnetic field. This has been disproven many times, by the discovery of vertical sequences of rock strata which were laid down during periods of time when magnetic reversals were in effect.
- (5) The belief that polonium radiohaloes can be found only in rocks which were created on "Day one" of creation, since all isotopes of polonium have a very short half-life. Robert V. Gentry observed a great number of these haloes in samples of granite rock, which he thought were original "primordial rocks," and that no polonium haloes could ever be found in younger igneous rocks. But in about 1989 he was shown to be entirely wrong, because an abundance of the haloes was found in more recent, igneous, intrusive rocks. This was a great blow to young-earth creationism, as the polonium haloes were essentially the last supposed positive evidence for a young earth, which had not been disproven by scientific research.

At various times some young-earth creationists who have not been very familiar with the research related to these disproven "evidences" state in their lectures and writings that they are still valid. But this is usually an embarrassment to creationists who are more informed regarding the research which has been done.